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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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CORRECTED COPY OF JAKARTA 4965

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KPAL](#) [ID](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: SEMI-UNHINGED PALESTINIAN AMBASSADOR ALLEGES ABU
NIDAL GROUP STAGED "EMBASSY COUP D'ETAT"

REF: STATE 50417 (PLO CONTACTS)

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION

1. (SBU) Summary: Ordered by the new Hamas-led Palestinian Authority to leave his post after 14 years, Palestinian Ambassador to Indonesia Ribhi Awad is not going quietly and his ravings are providing mirth for the diplomatic corps and a protocol headache for the Indonesian government. In antics that GOI Foreign Ministry officials characterized privately as "embarrassing," Awad sent two bizarre "Top Urgent" diplomatic notes to the GOI and diplomatic corps alleging that he had valiantly fought off an "embassy coup d'etat" by a ranking member of the Abu Nidal group, who just a few weeks earlier had been Awad's trusted assistant and now claims to be Charge d'Affaires. The hijinx continued in an April 18 press conference in which Awad brandished a pistol, glowered at a pack of chortling journalists, and demanded that he be accorded ambassadorial status until he departs Indonesia, a day that apparently cannot come soon enough for the Indonesian Foreign Ministry. End Summary.

Power Flows from the Barrel of a Seal

2. (SBU) Ribhi Awad has been the Palestinian Authority's official representative to Indonesia since 1992. During that time he acquired an Indonesian spouse about half his age and two young children. He also acquired, through sheer attrition, the title of dean of the ambassador corps, a distinction upon which he has stood with all the self-effacing modesty of a megalomaniacal Bourbon monarch for the past several years. As a member of the Fatah organization, however, Awad's fortunes took a fateful turn with the recent election of a Hamas-led PA government, which ordered Awad to relinquish his duties and return to his homeland.

3. (SBU) Push has apparently come to shove within the Palestinian Mission, as Awad sent two frenzied "Top Urgent" diplomatic notes last week to the GOI Foreign Ministry and all diplomatic missions in Jakarta. The first note alleged that Nassar Abdul Wahab, Awad's one-time trusted assistant, had attempted an "embassy coup de etat" (sic) against Awad

but the putsch failed when Awad somehow managed to retain control of the all-important embassy seal. The second missive, a rambling and often incoherent seven-page handwritten "circular," alleged that Wahab was an agent of the Abu Nidal terrorist group who, along with two "disciples," had resumed efforts to "dislodge" Awad from his office and had held him hostage for a time. Although Awad claimed to have retained full control of the mission, we note that the letter did not bear an imprint of the embassy seal to which Awad had previously placed such paramount importance. Meanwhile, Wahab has informed the GOI that he is the Charge d'Affaires ad interim after Awad's "retirement."

Long Good-bye for a Pistol-Toting Diplomat?

¶4. (SBU) The Awad saga took an even more bizarre turn on April 18. After a brief farewell call on GOI Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda - according to a Foreign Ministry staffer, the press were deliberately excluded from the event for fear of encouraging even more theatrics from the portly, sixty-something Palestinian diplomat - Awad held a press conference at his mission in which he glowered at a pack of chortling journalists and brandished a pistol. (We note that Awad's ambassadorial pistol has seen service before, according to senior Jakarta diplomats. As the story goes, some years ago Awad's vehicle suffered a flat tire. As is common, an Indonesian man volunteered to change the flat and then asked for compensation for his efforts. Awad refused to tip the man, pulled out the firearm and - when the man became too insistent - allegedly shot him in the foot). Awad also demanded that he be accorded full ambassadorial status until he departs Indonesia. That day apparently cannot come soon enough for the Indonesian Foreign Ministry: a staffer characterized Awad's antics and the underlying embassy succession scuffle as "childish" and "embarrassing" and

stated that the GOI simply wants Awad and the Palestinian flap to go away. The Indonesians may have to wait awhile, however. Although Awad stated in his "circular" that he would leave on May 19, he told the media that his departure date had been pushed back to May 30 and was contingent on the publication of four books he claims to be in the process of writing.

PASCOE